United Nations E/CN.6/2019/NGO/58

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
19 November 2018

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-third session
11–22 March 2019
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Presbyterian Church (USA) and Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Inc., non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

Statement

The Presbyterian Church (USA) welcomes the opportunity to address the social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by the 63rd Commission on the Status of Women. Because social protection systems, access to public services, and empowerment opportunities are even more precarious for women who are further marginalized by racism and binary definitions of gender, we highlight policies around racism and gender identity as key topics for the Commission to address.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has consistently understood our heritage to include both public witness and practical discipleship for God's justice in the world, particularly on behalf of the most marginalized in our midst. At this critical moment in history, when racism, sexism and misogyny explicitly abound throughout the current culture, causing significant spiritual and emotional violence against women, it is imperative for the church and the world to hear the voices of those long silenced.

Racism is the opposite of what God intends for humanity. It is the rejection of the other, which is entirely contrary to the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ. It is a form of idolatry that elevates human-made hierarchies of value over divinely-given free grace. Through colonization and slavery, the United States of America helped to create and embrace a system of valuing and devaluing people based on skin colour and ethnic identity. The name for this system is white supremacy. This system deliberately subjugated groups of people for the purpose of material, political, and social advantage. Racism is the continuing legacy of white supremacy. Racism is a lie about our fellow human beings, for it says that some are less than others. It is also a lie about God, for it falsely claims that God favours parts of creation over the entirety of creation.

We recognize the pervasive sin of racism. Since the invasion by Europeans, indigenous peoples have born the brutal consequences of white supremacy. And in conversations in the church around racism and racial disparities, girls and women of colour (African, Asian, Latina/Hispanic) are often overlooked, undervalued, and rendered invisible. These external views and tropes seek to dehumanize and stereotype girls and women of colour. Studies consistently demonstrate that starting at a young age, black girls are disproportionately suspended and expelled from school, a crisis that has continued repercussions for black girls, women, and whole communities. In the United States, although black girls and women are only 13 per cent of the overall population, they make up 1/3 of the people killed by police. Further, research indicates that black girls' childhoods are erased as they are viewed as needing less nurturing, protection, support, and comforting, and as more independent, knowing more about adult topics, and knowing more about sex.

On gender identity, the Presbyterian Church (USA) stands in the conviction that all people are created in the image of God and that the Gospel of Jesus is good news for all people, and affirms its commitment to the full welcome, acceptance, and inclusion of transgender people, people who identify as gender non-binary, and people of all gender identities within the full life of the church and the world. We affirm the full dignity and the full humanity of transgender people, their full inclusion in all human rights, and their giftedness for service. We affirm the church's obligation to stand for the right of people of all gender identities to live free from discrimination, violence, and every form of injustice.

These affirmations and this commitment are rooted and grounded in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in the breadth of Scripture, and in the Reformed Tradition. Scripture affirms that all people are created in the image of God. In God's creation, we see, and experience God's image expressed across a broad and life-giving expression gender.

Honouring the breadth and variety of our gender identities and expressions is one of the ways we can come to an even deeper understanding of who we are created to be in relationship to God and each other. The Hebrew Scriptures, the Gospel, and the Reformed Tradition affirm the dignity and worth of all people and call on individuals and communities to work for the well-being and protection of all people. Because we recognize that people of all gender identities are created equally in the image of God, we also recognize that we share a mutual obligation to stand for the right of all people and all gender identities and gender expression to live free from discrimination and from violence. The image of God expansively and specifically includes people of all gender identities including transgender, cisgender, gender non-binary people and people of all gender expressions.

We acknowledge that the church has fallen short of these commitments and obligations. In the world and in the church, transgender people too often experience and suffer discrimination and violence, particularly transgender women of colour who experience violence and discrimination at much higher rates than even their Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual peers. The church has failed to understand fully and to celebrate adequately the full spectrum of gender embodied in God's creation. As a result, we have participated in systemic and targeted discrimination against transgender people, and we have been complicit in violence against them. We affirm the scriptural obligation to work for justice for all God's children, and particularly here to work for justice for people of all gender identities. We have fallen short of this obligation, and -by the grace of God- commit ourselves to do better and call on United Nations member states to do the same.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) calls on governments to affirm the right of all individuals regardless of gender orientation, race, or sexual identity to:

- Full legal protection for all persons against discrimination, particularly with regard to employment, housing, education and health care inclusive of full access to sexual and reproductive health options;
- Serve in the military, and every type of government and public service;
- Full access to public accommodation, including gender-inclusive restrooms;
- Protections for transgender students against violence and bullying;
- Other legal protections that guarantee and safeguard the full rights of transgender individuals;
- Provide legal protections for all persons who experience sexual and relationship abuse;
- Remove economic barriers to women's educational opportunities and promote an equitable sharing of authority and responsibilities in family life, work and society, as well as equal access to economic and political power.
- Equal protection and access to government and decision-making bodies for all races and genders.
- Fully implement the Beijing Platform for Action and other relevant international agreements such as The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ensure discrimination and gender biases are eliminated in local and national laws, policies and customs.